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DEVELOPING GRADUATE STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THE USE OF SOURCES IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

1. Introduction

The writing of this paper has been motivated by a couple of reasons. On the one hand, recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in developing academic writing skills and academic discourse genre studies (e.g., Swales 1990; Hyland 2009). On the other hand, conducting an MA seminar in applied linguistics in the Jagiellonian University English Studies Department made me aware of a changing scene in education in Poland (Niżegorodcew 2010). An additional motive was my involvement in an intercultural project carried out by Polish and Ukrainian English Departments focused on developing inter and intracultural competence through readings in English as a *lingua franca* (Niżegorodcew, Bystrov and Kleban 2011).

The aim of the present paper is first of all practical. It focuses on ways of developing graduate students' awareness of the use of other authors' works, that is *sources*, in the MA thesis preparation process. *Sources* are contrasted with *resources*, understood as students' own conceptualisations of ideas derived from the sources. The field of the students' MA research is applied linguistics as a discipline of study at an English department.

The first part of this paper describes current changes in academic studies in Poland, leading to an unprecedented variety of graduate students' academic backgrounds. The next part focuses on the proposed distinction between sources and resources in the light of the debate on plagiarism. It also describes a small-scale research study on plagiarism carried out among Polish and Ukrainian university students. Finally, some practical tasks developing

academic writing skills are presented. In particular, they have been designed to develop skills needed by graduate students to use other authors' works in their own conceptualisations in the process of MA thesis writing.

2. Variety of new graduate students

Since the academic year 2010/11 the English Department of the Jagiellonian University has admitted new graduate students. It was a consequence of the reform of the education system in Poland and the Bologna Process, which led to the division of former five-year philological MA studies into three-year Licentiate studies and two-year MA studies. One of the MA specialisations in the English Department is applied linguistics. After having been separated from other philological specialisations by its graduate studies status, the applied linguistics specialisation in the English Department has become a more independent discipline within the English Studies field. The novelty of the discipline has been confirmed by its classification as *practical* studies rather than *general academic* ones and by its future modified MA thesis format.¹

Consequently, graduate students who have been admitted to the applied linguistics specialisation since the academic year 2010/11 differ considerably from five-year MA studies students. What is being observed in the second year of the transition period between five-year and two-year MA studies is an unprecedented variety of graduate students' academic backgrounds, involving their knowledge of the field of studies and experience with using written academic English, in particular, experience with writing research papers. In the latter, appropriate uses of sources in the process of writing one's own texts is one of the most essential abilities.

Before embarking on the question of students' uses of sources and resources, let us present graduate students' first degree diploma projects.² They were of various length and quality and involved diverse research topics and methodologies, such as, a comparison of techniques in teaching English to different age groups (based on impressionistic observations), describing bilingual families (based on a few interviews with bilingual parents), comparative linguistic studies (*English loan-words in Japanese*, *English-induced changes in Polish compounds*), analysing causes and results of the attacks on the World Trade Center

¹ Beginning from the academic year 2012/13, MA theses in applied linguistics will resemble long research papers, with a greater focus on students' research and shorter background literature parts than the present theses.

² In the Jagiellonian University English Department out of seventeen Licentiate degree graduates admitted in the academic year 2011/12 to MA studies in applied linguistics, five students had not been required to submit any Licentiate projects to graduate from first degree studies.

or summarizing famous singers' biographies. Doubtlessly, Licentiate supervisors' interests had influenced the choice of topics but, surprisingly, only a few of them were concerned with the field of applied linguistics. As regards sources upon which the Licentiate projects were based, students provided extensive bibliographies. The question remains, however, whether the provided lists of books, articles and the Internet sources were used appropriately in the process of Licentiate project writing.

3. Using sources and resources in the light of the debate on plagiarism

On the one hand, the discussed MA students' awareness of the use of sources in their own future research seemed to be adequate, judging by the number and, to some extent, the range of the references they provided in the Licentiate projects. On the other hand, however, in the preliminary stages of MA thesis preparation, the graduate students were frequently unable to assess the quality of the selected sources, which might have been due to their limited knowledge of the field of applied linguistics and little experience with academic writing. Another problem the novice MA students faced in the first year of MA studies was integrating their own conceptualisations with other authors' works.

It is generally known that academic writing requires referencing to other authors' works. Wilczyńska and Michońska-Stadnik (2010: 252) give novices in academic writing the following basic guideline: "Scientific communication requires the author to indicate the source from which a given piece of information has been drawn" [translation – AN].

There are, however, several questions that must be asked as regards the above requirement: Should references be made to all ideas student authors discuss in their theses? How should sources be integrated into MA students' texts? Should the extensive use of sources be the primary requirement of the student authors or should they rely to a greater extent on their own conceptualisations?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, let us distinguish between *sources* and *resources*. The following definitions of sources and resources are proposed. *Sources* refer to other authors' works, whereas *resources* refer to student writers' conceptualisations of what they have selected and transformed from the other authors' ideas. Consequently, MA students can use their conceptualisations based on the knowledge they transformed from other authors' ideas without referencing but they should always make references to other authors' works. In practice, it is not easy to distinguish between other authors' intellectual property included in their works and ideas that have been transformed and which can be freely shared.

Let us provide an example of what this author means by merely documenting sources versus transforming knowledge gained from the sources into own conceptualisations which do not require references. In the following excerpt I have used Firth and Wagner's criticism of second language acquisition theory as an introduction to the discussion on the functions of English as a *lingua franca* of the contemporary world.

At the International Congress of Applied Linguistics in 1996, Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner delivered a critical paper, in which they criticised mainstream second language acquisition theory for being purely cognitive, that is psycholinguistic, without taking the sociocultural context of second language use into account (Firth and Wagner 1997). They claimed that second language learning/acquisition is closely combined with second language use, and the latter is undoubtedly affected by the sociocultural context in which it occurs (Nizegorodcew 2011: 30).

The source (Firth and Wagner 1997) is mentioned as a reference to the article I based my comments on. Instead of reporting literally what the source authors have written in their article, I give my own brief account of the essence of the critical remarks I refer to. Such a treatment of a source text by other authors transforms what has been originally written into their own conceptualisations serving their purposes in academic discourse.

Taking into account the distinction between sources and resources, the issue of plagiarism may not be as obvious as it seems. According to Western academic standards, plagiarism refers to using other authors' works without referencing. It is treated as a serious offence and equated with intellectual theft. Nevertheless, there are authors who believe that Western norms as regards intellectual property are not universal (Scollon 1995; Pennycook 1996; Thompson and Pennycook 2008). Bennett (2011) claims that Western academic norms are imposed upon other cultures, where intellectual property is not protected in the same way as in the West by copyright laws and where academic works are shared more liberally.

Questions concerning cases of plagiarism among students of the English Studies Departments in Poland and Ukraine were researched in small-scale survey research studies, in the Jagiellonian University English Department – by Stinnissen *et al.* (2011) and in the English Philology Department of the Precarpathian University – by Kulchytska, Gotsuliak, Kosmii, Pyskiv, Popel and Fediuk (unpublished report).

Among others, the following question has been asked: Have you ever submitted a piece of work that was not written entirely by yourself? The results of the survey are very interesting from the point of view of students' awareness of plagiarism. On the one hand, the research subjects from both universities do not admit committing plagiarism in the strict Western sense of the word of stealing an intellectual property. Out of 80 Jagiellonian University students,

only 2 students answered that they had submitted a piece of work that had not been written entirely by themselves. Out of 69 the Precarpathian University students nobody admitted that they had committed plagiarism. On the other hand, the results of the studies indicate that both Polish and Ukrainian students are aware of academic cheating and the majority of them admitted that they had cheated during their studies.

Such an approach can be considered as one end of the continuum of approaches to the use of sources, in which the authors are more concerned with the development of their ideas drawing on whatever sources are available, frequently unaware of the referencing conventions and Western academic norms. Following such an approach, novice MA students frequently believe that if they document sources, they do not express their own ideas properly.

The other approach to the use of sources, particularly common in the Western tradition, involves full reliance on the authority of the referenced publications. Paradoxically, however, a very strict adherence to the above Western anti-plagiarism norms may result in students' total abandoning their authorship. In Scollon's words, the result is that students "take the *safe path* of constructing their texts as *patchworks* or *mosaics* of referenced citations from different sources, in which their own input is limited to linking those sources together" (Scollon 1995: 21-22).

Such academic writing practice has also become very popular among Polish novice MA writers. In recent years numerous MA introductory chapters avoid expressing any authorial ideas but instead they report on students' background readings, as if independent of the proposed research questions. Moreover, while using sources, novice MA writers tend to report indiscriminately on whatever they find in background literature, even on articles loosely connected with their proposed research.

This observation reminds us of Bereiter and Scardamalia's remark (1987) that a characteristic feature of mature writers is to *transform* knowledge to suit their own purposes, while novice writers are characterised by writing what they happen to *know*. Knowledge transformation consists in writing only what is appropriate for a given purpose. It is to a great extent the question of selection of relevant sources and a further selection of relevant ideas in those sources.

Considering the distinction between sources and resources, the question arises how to make MA students aware of the appropriate use of sources and to sensitise them to using only those other authors' ideas that could be relevant for their own research projects. It seems that apart from teaching them how to use referencing conventions, they should be also educated in how to distinguish between reading sources for background information and making use of it in their own conceptualisations, that is transforming sources into resources.

4. Practical tasks

Academic writing has developed a system of procedures that should in theory enable MA students to develop their own writing expertise, including the skill of referencing, under supervision of more experienced and skilled academic supervisors. In practice, however, academic supervisors themselves are sometimes ignorant of the subtle differences between using sources, that is, other authors' works, and resources, that is, other authors' ideas transformed by the student writers to suit their purposes. The following practical tasks can be used by MA thesis supervisors and MA students to develop academic writing skills needed in thesis preparation, in particular, in making references to other authors' works and in transforming other authors' ideas into own conceptualisations.

Task 1. Doing library research /Internet quest in search of relevant sources

This is an indispensable step in any research and in the case of MA students it should be carried out under the supervisor's guidance. Below some fragmentary references of my MA students are presented. Such lists can be used, e.g.:

- a) to analyse referencing conventions according to particular style sheets (e.g. changing one convention into another),
- b) to develop critical reading of sources (e.g. on the basis of the lists, MA students can be asked to guess what MA topics have been proposed).

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Task 2. Writing abstracts for published articles

The next step in making MA students aware of their role in using published sources is teaching them how to write abstracts, that is condensed texts in which they do not have to make references but they should distil main ideas of the original texts. In abstract writing students should first highlight main ideas in the articles, they may write in teams, use the think-aloud technique and revise drafts.

Task 3. Transforming a literature survey article into an article for a particular purpose and readers

This is the most typical task to practise changing a knowledge-telling text into a knowledge-transforming text. Students can practise a few different versions, with different purposes and readers (e.g. as an article to be published in an academic journal or in a popular journal, for more experienced readers or for novices in the field).

Task 4. Peer reviewing of Task 3 in pairs

Peer reviewing gives students access to their friends' approaches to the task of transforming knowledge and integrating own conceptualisations with other authors' ideas. The supervisor's role should be to provide students with some criteria of assessment.

5. Conclusion

An appropriate use of sources does not only mean making references to all articles and books that have been cited or referred to in one's own text. A more important ability MA students and other academic writers should acquire is the ability to integrate own conceptualisations with the sources. At present, MA students specialising in applied linguistics are being trained how to write their own authorial texts on the basis of relevant sources. It is not only the choice of sources that is a great challenge for the students but also the development of a right balance between relying on other authors' works and formulating own ideas. On the one hand, MA students must become aware of their own responsibility for ideas expressed in MA theses. Consequently, they must avoid excessive referencing to other authors' works. On the other hand, however, students must be aware of the Western standards concerning referencing, copyright and plagiarism.

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